Teaching Idea

Mind Maps: A Lesson In Creativity

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Abstract
Teaching through mind maps can stimulate the visual learner in any of our students. The techniques of this art take ten minutes to learn and can be applied to nearly every aspect of education. Examples are included which show how my students have utilized these innovative methods and creative techniques to foster introspection, take notes in class, reflect on an experience, brainstorm ideas, and set goals. I have also included one of the mind maps I made for a lesson on Macbeth, on which my students’ notes have been written over mine.

I’ve been teaching secondary English for the past 20 years and have made some headway with the challenge of teaching creativity. It is easier than you think, and most of my ideas, techniques, and philosophies can be found at www.thecreativitycore.com. For this teaching tip, I want to share with you one of the primary methods I use to unlock the creative mind: help students take better notes, design an essay, organize thoughts, celebrate an accomplishment, brainstorm ideas, or engage in a variety of other mental operations.

To teach your students mind mapping, all you have to do is require them to bring felt-tip markers to class, show them the "art gallery" at my website, and explain that "it is all based on having a central core and ideas radiating from the core." You can also emphasize the value of arrows (showing the direction of thoughts), the addition of artwork, and the importance of creating each individual’s own style.

Mind mapping is the antidote to soporific classes, boring outlines, and frustrating writer's block. This technique can be transforming for any student—no matter the age, learning style, ability or disability. Let me take you through a few examples and explain what mind maps can accomplish.
To Foster Introspection

A student (or anyone else) who begins the mind-mapping process enters an introspective state and can learn a lot about him- or herself. My students have come up with all kinds of introspective mind maps, including "Career Options," "My Negative and Positive Attributes," and "Books to Read." This unique example of an introspective mind map is from a portfolio introduction.
To Take Notes In a Class
The mind-mapping techniques can be used to more effectively learn in any class. The classroom experience becomes more captivating when students take notes with colorful markers in a free-flowing and organic mind map. My students are encouraged to submit mind maps from any of their courses, not just English.
To Reflect On An Experience

Language arts teachers have the privilege of making student lives a central part of the curriculum through memoir, poetry, and varied narrative genres. A mind map can serve as a way to generate details for a story, or it can be the art form itself. This student helped raise money to fight cancer, and she celebrated the experience by committing the memories to brightly colored words on paper.
To Brainstorm Ideas

Mind mapping can be an effective strategy to collaborate with others on ideas or just brainstorm by yourself. This one was created during a meeting of school newspaper staff: The reporters were preparing an article on how Chinese classes had become more popular than Latin classes.
To Set Goals

I always lead students through a goal-setting exercise by asking them to mind map their "short-term, medium range, and lifelong goals." It is essential to set goals and to help our students learn to apply this vital skill. This one is a student's "bucket list."
To Teach Literature

Why should students be the only ones to make mind maps? I break down all my literary units into mind maps, and the pupils add their notes on top of mine. For example, I teach *Macbeth* through a series of a dozen mind maps. On each one I write down some key quotes, questions, and information I want to get out to my students as we study or perform the play in class. Then the pupils are invited to add their ideas.
Daniel Weinstein teaches AP Language and Creative Writing at Great Neck South High School on Long Island. Most of his career has been devoted to student-centered techniques and workshop philosophies. His most important influences include the National Writing Project, the Leadership Academy at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, and the New England Art program.